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Physical Activity in Schools

Benefits Fact Sheet

Decreasing budgets and increasing pressures on academic achievement have reduced opportunities for physical activity in many Canadian school systems.¹ Declining activity levels warrant the reevaluation of the importance of physical activity in the school system, given that 85% of children and youth in Saskatchewan are not active enough to meet Canadian physical activity guidelines.² The school environment presents an excellent opportunity to instill the value of physical activity while positively impacting academic performance.³

The benefit of physical activity to academic performance is supported by the following research:

- Studies in over 10 countries identified **higher grades and grade point averages** among children and youth who engaged in habitual physical activity throughout the school day. Correspondingly, **reading ability, mathematic and Canadian Achievement test scores improved** alongside an increase in daily physical activity.⁴
- Cognitive **improvements in memory and concentration** were experienced post-exercise in both children and youth.⁵
- Individuals participating in daily 10 minute classroom-based physical activity sessions **led more active lifestyles outside of the school environment.**⁶
- Exercise intervention within the school day significantly **reduced disruptive behaviors, particularly among children with intellectual disabilities and diagnosed behavioral problems.**⁷
- **Reduced absenteeism and lower drop-out rates** were found among youth participating in school-based physical activity and sport programs.⁸
- The **increased self-esteem, self-confidence and self-image** associated with physical activity may indirectly relate to improved academic performance among children and youth.⁹



1, 3, 5, 6, 7 Mahar, M.T et. al. (2006). Effects of Classroom-Based Program on Physical Activity and On-Task Behavior. *Medicine & Science in Sports and Exercise*, 38 (12):2086-94.

2 2009 Active Health Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth: Saskatchewan Supplement. Retrieved from http://www.activehealthykids.ca/ecms.ashx/reportcard_full_higherres.pdf

4, 8 Trudeau, F. Shephard, R. J. (2008). Physical Education, School Physical Activity, School Sports and Academic Performance. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 5(10).

9 2009 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Retrieved from http://www.activehealthykids.ca/ecms.ashx/ReportCard2009/AHKC-Longform_WEB_FINAL.pdf